Toward a Mandatory Work Policy for Men

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Introduction

The immediate cause of most poverty among families is nonwork by the parents. In 2004, only 37 percent of poor adults reported any employment at all, compared to 68 percent for the population. For full-time, full-year work, the disparity was even greater—11 versus 45 percent. Among all families with children, 83 percent of the heads worked and 61 percent worked full-time and full-year, but among the poor the figures were only 56 and 22 percent.[1] Nonwork usually reflects withdrawal from the labor force, although it also includes those who are jobless and looking for work.

Unwed pregnancy has recently received much attention, but as a cause of poverty it comes second to nonwork. In 2001, 13 percent of families with children were poor. For the single mothers to marry would have reduced that rate to 9.5 percent, but for the employable family heads to work full-time would have reduced it to 7.5 percent.[2] Aside from raising incomes, work helps to integrate the poor. The public sees employment as a sign of good citizenship. It is working families, not the nonworking, who have the best chance to move to better neighborhoods and be accepted by their new neighbors.

Welfare reform has spotlighted the work difficulties of poor mothers, but the problem may be worse among men. In 2004, 42 percent of poor men worked, 16 percent full-year and full-time. That was more than poor women in general. Poor single mothers, however, had figures of 55 and 17 percent. Their work levels have risen considerably in recent years due to welfare reform. How could work levels among poor men be raised in the same way? That is the question I address here.

Some would regard unwed pregnancy, school failure, or substance abuse as worse problems than nonwork, but they tend to be closely linked to it. One reason youth drop out of school or drift into the drug trade is that they fail to connect to legitimate employment. And employment may offer society’s best point of leverage to change poverty lifestyle. Raising work levels is possible because the employment goal is widely shared. Most poor adults want to work, and getting them to do so is popular. In contrast, other routes to helping the needy, such as income transfers, promoting marriage, or reforming urban schools, arouse much more conflict.

Government failed to raise poverty work levels by much until the 1990s. This was partly because the work problem was understood too much in economic terms. Poor adults were seen as lacking in "human capital"; their skills should be raised through education and training, many said, or their incentives to work should be strengthened. Some recent proposals to help nonworking men still have this flavor. Experience and research have taught, however, that authority matters as much as the opportunity structure. In the 1990s, welfare reform succeeded by combining new benefits that supported work, especially wage and child care subsidies, with clearer demands to work in return for aid. That combination, plus superb economic conditions, propelled welfare mothers into the working world as never before.

Much of this effect, it is important to note, came through diversion, with little direct tie to welfare itself. As reform took hold in the 1990s, welfare mothers got a message that work was now expected of them. In response, many of them went to work and left aid before they were told to. Many more single mothers took jobs without going on welfare at all. Change was driven by a political dynamic wider than social policy. The effects were finally much larger than one would have anticipated from the evaluations of welfare work programs.[3]

Work levels among poor men might be raised in the same way. For men, there is no broad structure like welfare that could be used to motivate work, but the child support and criminal justice systems can play a similar role. Specifically, I propose federally-funded experiments in mandatory work programs for two key groups among low-income men—nonpayers of child support and ex-offenders leaving the prisons. Well-implemented, such programs might change expectations and trigger the same broad shift toward higher employment achieved by welfare reform.

In the sections below, I describe the male work problem and its causes. I argue that benefit-oriented solutions such as raising wages will be insufficient. Given the psychology of male nonwork, enforcing work is essential. Enforcement means that something that low-income men want must be conditioned on their working. I suggest what mandatory work programs tied to child support and criminal justice might mean. I propose federal demonstrations to develop such programs further. Finally, I consider several objections.

Nonworking Men

Table 1 shows that in 2004 there were 7.5 million men aged 16-50 under the poverty line. The vast majority were white. Men poor over several years would no doubt be more nonwhite. Poor men comprise a higher percentage of all men aged 16-24 than they do of the older ages. As they age, most men settle into regular employment and their poverty rate falls. This same pattern is seen in each of the racial or ethnic subgroups, but blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans have much higher poverty rates at all ages than whites or Asians.

[Table 1 about here.]

Table 2 shows work levels for the population of men versus the poor in 2004 using the same categories. The contrast is dramatic. The poor have about as many men out of work as men in general have working full-time and full-year. For the population, the proportion of men working full-time and full-year is only a quarter at age16-24, but it surges to over 70 percent in the later ages. Nonwork correspondingly drops sharply, although it rises slightly between ages 25-35 and 36-50. For the poor, however, full-time work barely rises past a quarter by age 25-35 before falling again, and the rise in nonwork by age 36-50 is much larger. Most of these men will depart employment well before the usual retirement age.

[Table 2 about here.]

For the population, all the racial and ethnic categories show similar trajectories, although work levels run a little lower for blacks and Native Americans than the norm. Among the poor, nonwork dominates for every group, but work levels run conspicuously lower for blacks and higher for Hispanics than the average. Nearly two-thirds of poor black men aged 16-50 and three-quarters of those aged 16-24 reported *no employment at all* in 2004.

Furthermore, trends over time are adverse. For men under age 35 with no more than a high school education and out of school, employment has fallen steadily since the 1980s. Within this group, the fall was particularly severe for blacks in the 1990s, despite the boom of that era. Their work levels fell 13-16 points, adjusting for demographic changes, and by 2000 barely half of those aged 16-24 and not in school were employed.[4] The implications for poverty are dire. Men without steady earnings seldom marry or stay married, nor are they likely to support their children.

Causes

What explains the unusually low work levels among poor men, especially blacks?[5] Traditionally, economists cite impersonal causes such as changes in the labor market or other barriers to employment. Following the recent boom, this approach is less plausible than a cultural account that stresses male psychology and the breakdown of work discipline.

Labor Supply

Economists assume that people will work if doing so is worth more to them than not working. If they work more or less than before, the reason must be that employment has become worth more or less relative to other pursuits. Thus, work levels should vary positively with wage levels, what is called the substitution effect. Economists note that wage levels among the low-skilled (those with a high school education or less) stagnated or fell during the 1970s and 1980s, while their work levels also fell. They infer that the men worked less because they were paid less.

However, lower wages can also generate an incentive to work more. With lower pay per hour, workers have to put in more work time to cover their financial needs; conversely, higher wages allow one to work less. Work levels should then vary inversely with wages, what is called the income effect. When wages change, whether the substitution or income effect dominates is unclear *a priori*. However, several economists estimate that, at least for low-paid workers, the substitution effect dominates. That is, work levels should vary directly, not inversely, with wages.[6]

But these estimates are based on data before 1990. In the 1990s, real wages for the low-skilled rose, especially late in the decade. Work levels for poor single mothers also rose—but they continued to fall for low-skilled men. The first change is consistent with the above economic theory, but the second is not. Now one can explain the work fall in economic terms only by supposing that the quality of low-skilled male labor fell for reasons not captured by education levels, causing fewer men to seek or obtain work. Or work fell for reasons other than willingness to work.[7]

Labor demand

Some economists also argue that demand for low-skilled labor has fallen in ways not reflected just in falling wage levels. Some employers seem less patient with low-skilled workers than they once were. They have allowed pay to vary more extremely with a worker's education than it once did, leaving the low-skilled worse off. Under pressure from restructuring and globalization, they demand that low-paid employees show adaptability and produce without problems, or be replaced.[8] This theory, however, cannot explain why the economy has sucked in millions of unskilled immigrants from Latin America and Asia. Nor can it account for the large variations in work levels among different groups of poor men.

Another approach is to look to shifts within the low-skilled labor force. Economists used to think that the flood of women into the labor force in the 1970s and 1980s drove down wages and employment for young blacks, but in the 1990s there is no sign of this.[9] George Borjas argues that rapid immigration from Mexico, both legal and illegal, has depressed unskilled male wages and employment. Anecdotes suggest that employers today often hire women or illegal aliens rather than native-born blacks, viewing them as more tractable. But other economists question these effects. They are in any even too small to explain the low black male work levels or their decline even in the tight labor markets of the later 1990s.[10]

Other barriers

Other economic trends are sometimes cited as barriers to employment by the poor. The mismatch theory asserts that jobs have become less accessible to the inner-city poor, either because jobs moved from urban areas to the suburbs, the South, or overseas, or because they now demand more education than poor adults have. This theory seemed more plausible in the 1970s and 1980s, when deindustrialization was rampant, than in the 1990s, when legions of unskilled job seekers—immigrants as well as welfare mothers—found jobs in cities. Even in a globalizing economy, most jobs do not demand a four-year college education, and many of these jobs still pay well.[11]

Wages and incomes have become much more unequal since the 1980s, and some suggest that this explains poverty. But inequality is largely a different problem. It is still possible for low-skilled Americans to escape poverty and get ahead by working steadily in available jobs and claiming remaining benefits, particularly Food Stamps and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The fact that the rich are doing even better over their heads is largely irrelevant.[12]

Oppositional culture

More likely, work discipline among low-skilled men has broken down, so that many do not take advantage even of the jobs they can get. The biggest reason for nonwork by unskilled younger blacks in the 1990s appears to be that many of them feared wage deductions to pay child support orders, or they had been incarcerated.[13] As those patterns suggest, an oppositional culture has developed where poor men flout mainstream norms, including the work ethic, even at economic cost. The problem is not that they reject work norms; like other poor people, they usually accept them. But they do not do what steady work requires. The problem is with conduct rather than values.[14]

For poor women, the reason for nonwork is often lack of confidence. For men, one reading is that they accept work as a goal but are lured away from it by the temptations of the street, such as the drug trade.[15] Another view is that men resist taking low-wage jobs as beneath them. Black youth, compared to whites of the same qualifications, demand higher wages before they will accept a job. Economists say that they have higher reservation wages.[16] But this framing is too anodyne, suggesting a quality of calm calculation. Actually, passion reigns. Black youth will often decline working for "chump change" even if it means not working at all. Or they accept the jobs but then find them unrewarding or abusive, causing them to leave or be fired.[17] That pattern is not rational but dysfunctional—counter to the interests of the men themselves, as well as the society.[18]

Low-skilled blacks feel that employers treat them as expendable, firing them on the least provocation. To the employers, however, it seems that the men simply "don't want to work." So they grow wary of hiring them, particularly minorities and ex-offenders, often preferring women or immigrants instead. One cannot call this racist in the usual sense of rejecting blacks *per se*, because black employers voice the same complaints as whites.[19] The men also commonly fail as husbands and fathers. Spouses expect them to work regularly to support the family, but they often refuse, or they get into drugs or crime. So the women give up on them and raise their children alone.[20] Soon the authorities come looking for them, demanding child support payments or arresting them for crimes.

Male psychology

At the heart of this behavior is something more primitive than economic calculation—a hunger for "dignity" or "respect." That quest is peculiarly masculine. More than most women, men typically work not just to make money but to be somebody. The male thing is to get out front for some cause, and by so doing to vindicate oneself. That drive motivates men's achievements, but it is dangerous unless it is harnessed to larger purposes, typically employment and the family.[21] The trouble today, of course, is that poor men's drive to succeed has often lost these ties. Their quest for respect now seems merely self-serving. By asserting themselves without performing, they earn failure rather than respect.

This rebellious pattern often surfaces early in poor men's lives. By misbehaving they can alienate first their parents, then their teachers, and finally their employers. Each rejection makes the quest for dignity more desperate, producing further rebellion, which produces further rejection, in a descending spiral. To others, the men seem anarchic, yet they themselves feel powerless.[22] In the middle class, by contrast, most boys learn in infancy to satisfy their parents, then their teachers and bosses, in an ascending spiral. By behaving well, they achieve success and respect while also serving others. By behaving badly, poor men never get to first base.

This perspective helps to explain one of the mysteries of poverty—why poor men are more impaired than poor women. On average they are less employable than single mothers, even though the latter have children to worry about. The reason may be that their lot in life is less affirming. Poor women find their identity chiefly as mothers. They typically believe they can succeed in that role, even if to outside observers doubt it. They have to meet community standards for their children, but they not in direct competition with other mothers. They also have had their own mothers as mentors, even if their fathers were absent.[23] For them, working is an add-on. It usually poses practical problems, not a crisis of identity.

Men, in contrast, are wired to achieve self-esteem chiefly through tasks outside the home. That forces them into the labor market, a far more competitive arena than motherhood. They are up against other men much better prepared than themselves. They often lack fathers to guide them, and government does little to help them. So their failure, relative to better-off men, is virtually inevitable. Hence the prickly defensiveness that often blocks them from working at all, even at their own cost.

A critical issue is which causes which—reduced opportunities or the oppositional culture.[24] The opportunity structure would seem primary if we found that it had worsened while the oppositional culture arose. But we find, to the contrary, that attitudes seem to have worsened since the 1960s, the very period when opportunities for blacks improved due to civil rights. Work behavior among black men is worse today than it was under Jim Crow.[25] More equal opportunity may actually increase black men's frustration by making it more difficult to blame their failure on racism. Fairer treatment shifts the source of inequality from the society to the men themselves.

Still, low wages probably do help cause nonwork indirectly, by interacting with culture. When disadvantaged men confront the job market, their low wages dramatize their failure. This helps to trigger the cycle of rebellion and rejection, and it is this—more than low wages *per se*—that brings them down.

The loss of work discipline

Among successful men, what keeps male assertiveness in line is early conditioning. Middle-class boys of all races internalize the values and lifestyle of their parents. By obeying their elders—especially their fathers—they are prepared later to obey their teachers and employers. They are then able to assert themselves in legitimate ways that serve both their own advancement and society's. To be sure, working does not solve all their problems. They still have to struggle for adequate wages, through qualifying for raises or promotions, or through trade union or political action. But by becoming steady workers, they at least got their foot on the ladder.

Today's urban poverty arose chiefly because that discipline somehow broke down in the mid twentieth century among the low-income, especially blacks. Mysteriously, many parents lost their own discipline and then their authority over children. Fathers failed to work and often disappeared. Their sons then became rootless, seeking to work but not knowing how. The collapse came in the1960s paradoxically, just when society was *expanding* rather than contracting black opportunities.

Poverty, therefore, reflects social disorder more than deficient opportunity. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote of the problems of Irish immigrants as well as blacks, ". . . a community that allows a large number of young men to grow up in broken homes, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future—that community asks for and gets chaos."[26] The chief solution to poverty then is to restore order. Government must provide some of the pressure to work that today's poor have not internalized.

Voluntary Programs

When the political class becomes aware of a new social problem, its initial instinct is to seek causes outside the people involved. Later as cultural causes emerge, these early responses come to seem sentimental. Realism takes over, and the sufferers come to bear more onus for their difficulties. So here, when low-income men first come on the radar screen, the press characterizes them as oppressed by external conditions—as child support defaulters overwhelmed by their arrears, or as ex-offenders without support in the community.[27] But it is already apparent that the men's problem also reflects lifestyle. So solutions that merely enlarge opportunities and or provide services and benefits cannot suffice.

Confronted with male nonwork, most analysts propose enhancing the opportunity structure in some way. They would either pay the unskilled men more or provide them education and training to raise their skills and pay. On the record, such programs would produce some gains, but they would not produce much steadier work, which is the main problem.

Wage subsidies

The minimum wage might be raised. Its current level, $5.15, is below historic levels in real terms. The objections are that doing this might destroy some low-skilled jobs, and most of the workers who would benefit are already above poverty. Most analysts would prefer to raise wage subsidies, which do not deter hiring and are better targeted on the low-income. Some propose qualifying a noncustodial father for the same generous EITC that is now paid to custodial parents of children—as much as 40 percent of wages—provided the father paid his child support. Or they would limit how much an absent fathers has to pay in child support, as this is a "tax" on earnings.

Some also would expand the much smaller EITC given to single low-wage workers or create a more general subsidy for all low-wage workers.[28]

Raising wages would no doubt make poor men *better off* in some sense. They could either make more if they worked, or make the same amount by working less. But whether they would *work more hours*, which is the goal here, is doubtful. Work disregards that welfare included before the 1990s changed recipients' work behavior very little.[29] A similar finding, that low-paid work effort was largely inelastic to wages, came from the federal income maintenance experiments.[30] In the 1900s, the EITC appeared to raise work levels by more, but its influence is difficult to separate from that welfare work tests and the good economy, which cut in the same direction.[31] And this finding applies to largely to women rather than men. No evaluation has shown that raising wages would produce more work by low-skilled men.[32] One statistical study of whether black youth work more consistently when they get better jobs returned equivocal results.[33] Even if higher wages had stronger effects, no likely increase in unskilled pay would allow it compete with the drug trade.

Raising wages might raise work levels long-term, because of the interaction with culture mentioned above. Paying poor men more is a visible sign that society values their labor. Over time, that might reconcile some of them to taking menial jobs. But in the short term, higher pay does not overcome the fractious psychology that now undermines male work. The chief value of higher pay may actually be political—in reconciling liberal leaders and opinion makers to the need for enforcement. What's fair is probably not the same thing as what works in getting poor men to labor, but it may have to be part of the package.

Education

Most disadvantaged men do badly at school. Many drop out, and few earn more than a high school diploma. Low skills are then a reason they receive low pay. How might they stay engaged in school longer, learn more skills, and thus merit higher pay? Most schools in low-income areas function poorly. Government has recently imposed outside standards (e.g., No Child Left Behind) and promoted choice and competition among schools. Another approach has been to create high schools that are smaller and focused on employment rather than college. But these schemes are opposed by teachers unions, so progress by this route must be glacial.

The alternative is compensatory programs that allow disadvantaged children to learn more outside the schools. Intensive preschool programs can raise employment and depress unwed pregnancy and crime in the later lives of students. Recently, some after school programs for at-risk teenagers have also shown promising impacts on education and health.[34] But these results come from a few experiments. The programs probably could not be expanded to a wider population and realize the same gains. Head Start, a national program, has not shown the same impacts found in the most noted preschool pilot programs. And even if the programs were effective at scale, their effects would be long delayed. The connection to adult employment is too indirect for this to be the main solution to the male work problem.

Training

The final voluntary approach to the work problem has been training targeted at low-skilled workers after they have left school.[35] With exceptions noted below, these programs have shown much smaller effects than the mandatory work programs that transformed welfare. An evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in the 1990s revealed only slight earnings gains for adults—smaller for men than women—and losses for youth.[36] One reaction is that the programs are simply underfunded.[37] Another—more plausible in my view—is that the clients commonly lack the ability to raise their skills by much. The only way to raise their wages, then, will be through regulating wages or providing wage subsidies, as suggested above.[38]

But voluntary training has failed as well because of the misconception that the main obstacle blocking work was low skills. Actually, it is work discipline. When men are poor in America, it is usually because they do not work consistently at *any* job, not because they earn low wages. That has been apparent since the 1960s.[39] What trainers really need to instill, if they can, is the personal organization to get and stick with any job. If trainees have this, then employers will teach them specific skills. That commitment is what immigrants typically show today, as their native-born competitors often do not. So like education, improved training can make only a limited contribution to solving the male work problem.

The Need for Structure

The record suggests strongly that what opportunity measures fail to do is confront the oppositional culture. Nonworking men must comply with legitimate demands to work, however hard that is, before they can expect to earn the success and respect they crave. Only this can halt the current negative cycle, where resistance produces failure. Only this can begin a positive cycle, where compliance produces steadier work and advancement.

How to bring about that shift is the great question. The welfare precedent suggests that work must be enforced. It must become an obligation and not a choice. To achieve this, programs must link help and hassle. There must be some chance for success—some respect—up front. But there must also be definite demands to work steadily at the jobs offered or available, backed up by some kind of sanction.

Directive programs

Social programs for nonworkers must be directive. They must tell their clients clearly that they are expected to work. Programs framed as incentives or as additions to human capital leave work too much as a choice. The evidence for this is that, in the policy areas just mentioned, the most successful programs have been the most directive. Welfare reform mandated work for welfare mothers as a condition of aid. And among reform programs, the most successful have used case managers to check up on clients to be sure they fulfill their obligations, a style I call paternalist.[40]

Among innovative high schools, the one clear success has been Career Academies, a form of school-within-a-school where teachers engage small groups of students in a family-like setting. Instructors set high standards and then help youth attain them with more sustained and personalized attention than they get in the usual high school.[41] The training program with the largest impacts has been Job Corps, which places disadvantaged youth in a prep-school-like setting, away from home, where they are closely supervised.[42] Similarly, the National Guard Youth Challenge Corps sends disadvantaged youth to a military base for five months followed by a year of mentoring by National Guard members. The youth begin as dropouts, but 73 percent of the graduates have obtained high school diplomas or a GED.[43]

All these programs are for youth. Government has failed so far to generate comparable structures for adult men. Such programs must be both more supportive and more demanding than traditional training. Rather than just impart skills, they must address the troubled relations that disadvantaged men often have with employers. The program itself must exemplify a constructive relationship between the worker and authority, trading acceptance for performance.

A model might be the Center for Employment Training, a noted training organization in San José, California. Local employers work closely with CET to define well-paying jobs they need to fill. The program then prepares trainees to take them with full-day sessions that mimic actual work. The key appears to be that real opportunities are offered, but the clients are also under strong pressure from the program—and the surrounding Hispanic community—not to waste their opportunity. Unfortunately, CET has not proven replicable in other locations.[44]

The military model

The limitation of all these youth programs and CET is that they are voluntary and cannot literally enforce work. That is, clients can walk away from the programs without losing anything of immediate value. The programs thus depend on informal suasions to maintain involvement. How could men be *required* to work in the same manner as welfare mothers?

Some have seen the military as a possible answer. Hugh Price, a close observer of black youth, remarks on the power of military service to straighten out kids he knew growing up who never connected with school. The army imposed discipline while it also offered advancement to soldiers who performed. .It taught what society wants all youth to learn—that "if you do a job well, you get ahead." In the late 1980s, when conditions for ghetto youth had sharply deteriorated, another expert observer opined that it might be time to "conscript them for their own good."[45]

The military achieves exactly the sublimation of male assertiveness mentioned above. The "four-star general," as Daniel Moynihan wrote in the "Moynihan Report," expresses the "very essence of the male animal," which is "to strut." Especially, the military offers an arena for blacks to succeed in where equal opportunity is unquestioned. But at the same time, officers in the military act like the fathers that many youth never had, strictly enforcing compliance with rules and orders.[46] So the effect on black recruits can be highly salutary.

But few blacks tested well enough to qualify for the army even in 1965. Even fewer can do so today, when the military is volunteer and seldom admits high school dropouts. To achieve work enforcement, then, the best approach is to adapt other large institutions that already exert authority over many low-income men.. How might they incorporate the goal of raising men's work levels?

Child Support Enforcement

One of these structures is child support enforcement. Traditionally, low-income men have viewed that system as one-sided, interested only in their money and favoring single mothers over them.[47] As noted above, child support appears to have driven down the work levels of low-skilled young black men. But conceivably the system could also promote employment, to the benefit of both the men and child support collections.

The problem

Only a minority of female-headed families receive support from absent parents. In 2001, among the 2.8 million poor single mothers, only 56 percent had a child support order and only 31 percent received any payment. The problem is largest among black men, since 68 percent of black births were outside marriage in 2002, much the highest rate for any race. Probably a quarter of black men aged 16-24—and half of those aged 25-34—are noncustodial fathers.[48]

Establishing paternity and obtaining support orders is the leading difficulty in enforcing support, but second to it is getting the fathers to pay. Government has made much more progress in establishing support orders than in obtaining payment.[49] In 2001, approximately 689,000 absent fathers owed child support to poor families and did not pay any.[50] Many other paid less than they owed. These are the men where one cause of nonpayment is likely to be nonwork.

Past programs

Middle class absent fathers are relatively easy to locate, they usually have enough income to pay, and they cannot easily abscond. The low-income father is tougher to find and has less to lose by evading support. And if he is located, family courts have difficulty determining his ability to pay. He may claim to be jobless and destitute, but how can judges be sure? They can tell him to get a job, but they cannot verify whether he does so.

Child support enforcement programs emerged to solve this problem. Judges now could remand nonpaying fathers to a work program, with the mandate to attend the program or pay up, on pain of going to jail. This is an obligation that the father cannot evade. If he is in fact working, the program will conflict with his job; forcing him to admit his earnings and pay support. Otherwise, the program can help him get a job. Thus help is combined with hassle.

In the 1990s, the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) demonstration offered low-income nonpaying fathers reduced support orders along with employment and other services. In return, they either had to pay their judgments or attend the program. Low-income cases were also reviewed more intensively. The program increased the share of clients paying support and the amount they paid, largely through "smoke-out" effects— participation revealed unreported jobs, forcing fathers to pay up. The fathers also valued the attention they received from the job clubs and support groups provided. But there were no clear gains for the fathers' employment or earnings.[51] Children First, a similar program in Wisconsin, recorded similar results.[52]

Critics say that PFS intervened in the child support problem too late, after the fathers had left the families and reneged on support. Better, if possible, to prevent breakup in the first place. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study found that most unwed parents plan to stay together at the point their child is born, although most split up within a year or two. "Fragile family" programs attempt to build that relationship through a range of services, but without work enforcement.[53] Instances include the Responsible Fatherhood and Partners for Fragile Families demonstrations, which ran in the late 1990s and early 2000s with government and foundation funding. Some Responsible Fatherhood sites showed encouraging gains in employment, earnings, and child support payment by fathers, but no experimental evaluations were done.[54] Without requiring work, impacts are probably unlikely.

Adding mandatory work

A more promising course is probably to improve child support enforcement programs. The employment side of PFS was underdeveloped. PFS made clear that the clients had to participate in the program or pay up, but not that they had to work. PFS still framed employment largely in passive and economic terms. It was presented as something the program provided to its clients through services such as job search, not as an obligation they owed to society. PFS banked heavily on arranging on-the-job training (OJT) for many of its clients. This proved difficult to do, in part because much of the funding had to come from JTPA.[55]

If PFS had included a more clearcut work requirement, it might have generated more smoke-out effects *and* employment gains. A work test would change PFS's requirement from "participate *or* pay up" to "work *and* pay up." Clients would have to get a job or work in one arranged by the program for 20 or 30 hours a week for a specified number of months, on pain of incarceration. Out of their earnings they would also pay their judgments. Then once they were working and paying, they could also qualify for training to enhance wages. That is the sequence typical of the more successful welfare work programs.[56]

Many absent fathers fall behind on their support payments, in part, because their judgments are not reduced when they are unemployed or in prison. These arrearages provide a further need—and opportunity—to enforce work. Some percentage of the arrearages owed to government might be forgiven for each month or year that a father paid his judgment. The effect would be to convert much of his monetary debt into a work obligation.[57] The rationale is that society benefits when the father works, not only when he pays money. Working generates favorable externalities for poor families and communities, aside from the support it generates.

Adding work enforcement would broaden the child support mission beyond collecting support to getting fathers to work. Some new benefits and programs would be needed to do this, but both work and support payment would be enforced more effectively than before.

Criminal Justice

The other important authority structure for low-income men is criminal justice. Ex-offenders exiting the prisons need employment to rebuild their lives. In the past, corrections have aimed mainly to incarcerate offenders. Work programs aimed at this group have not achieved much, but they could be improved, thus promoting reentry and reducing recidivism.

The problem

In the 1960s and 1970s, as more poor mothers went on welfare, more poor men committed offenses and crime rates soared. The nation responded by putting more offenders in prison and lengthening their sentences. Rates of incarceration went on increasing even in the 1990s after crime rates had started to fall. Over 2 million people are currently in prison or jail. The crime problem is again most severe among blacks—probably 30 percent of young black men have criminal records. Crime also overlaps substantially with the child support problem—probably 70 percent of male offenders are also noncustodial parents.[58]

As more men enter prison, more also leave. Around 630,000 men now exit the prisons annually—four times the level in 1978. Crime and reentry both impact a community. Few convicts learn meaningful skills while in prison, and few reliably reintegrate into the community upon their release. Recidivism runs high. Thirty percent of those released are re-arrested for new offences within six months, two-thirds within three years.[59]

Ex-offenders must reconnect with families, handle various health problems, and find housing. Failure at any of these hurdles can drive them into homelessness or addiction, or back into crime. In the long run, however, whether they make it in the outside world depends more than anything else on whether they work steadily.[60] Just as for other men, success—or failure—at work stands at the center of their lives.

Past programs

Criminal justice has fewer successful programs to draw on than other areas of antipoverty policy. In the 1970s, vocational programs in prisons appeared to have no impact on recidivism, prompting the conclusion that "nothing works." Later assessments are more positive. However, even preferred programs reduce recidivism by only 8 to 17 percent, and only a minority of inmates receive remediation in prison at all.[61] Prison-based rehabilitation appears to achieve little in part because it occurs inside the walls, removed from the conditions ex-offenders actually face upon their release.

Work programs for convicts outside the walls would appear more promising, but they have not yet shown impacts comparable to work programs in welfare. Ex-offenders were one of several groups served by the National Supported Work Demonstration run by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) in the late 1970s. This study placed disadvantaged job seekers in jobs created in local nonprofit agencies. It improved employment for welfare mothers and former drug addicts—but not for ex-offenders or youth. The ex-offenders did work more while they were in the program, but they also left it quickly, and then the effect dissipated.[62] In 1991-4, a program for convicts on work release in Washington State failed to reduce recidivism or costs, although it did help a minority of men transition from prison.[63]

The parole system oversees convicts who leave prison before their sentences end. Parole officers typically require that clients meet with them once or twice a month and take drug tests, among other rules. This looks like the sort of oversight that has helped to generate strong impacts in welfare work programs. Yet by itself parole does not reduce recidivism. Even intensive forms of supervision serve mainly to detect more violations of parole conditions such as drug tests.[64] Some experts have concluded—adapting a phrase from welfare reform—that we must "end parole as we know it."

In contrast to mandatory approaches, the Bush Administration in 2005 funded Ready4Work, a set of 17 voluntary demonstration projects aimed at prisoner reentry. One purpose is to involve faith-based organizations. The programs are service-oriented and do not enforce participation,[65] They thus must presume a motivated client. No doubt they will do some good, but it is difficult to believe that they will produce change. Nor could any change be proven, since no controlled evaluations are planned.

Improving work enforcement

The best course is probably to improve on past mandatory work programs for ex-offenders outside the walls. The problem with parole supervision is probably the system's focus on detecting violations of parole conditions. Changing client work behavior has been secondary. To affect recidivism, parole must be combined with demands that clients participate in programs aimed at their problems.[66] To promote employment, supervision must be aimed much more specifically at working, and it must be more immediate. The supervisor has to monitor actual work or job search, and there must be some immediate way to reward good behavior and penalize bad. The precedent is drug programs, where it is swift and certain punishments, not severe ones, that promote compliance.[67]

Besides better supervision, a second necessity is help in finding work. Low-paid jobs clearly are available, and most ex-offenders already find them on their own.[68] But most employers also say they probably would not hire former convicts, and unemployment among the group runs high.[69] The danger is real that some reentering offenders will take too long to find work, become discouraged, and return to crime. So a reentry work program must assure clients work in some way. Equally, men who might resist taking menial positions must be denied the excuse that jobs are unavailable. Christopher Jencks has argued that if jobs were guaranteed to the jobless adults of the ghetto, community pressure on them to go to work would be far more effective.[70]

But did not guaranteed jobs for ex-offenders fail in the work programs just mentioned? Yes, but Supported Work was voluntary. The ex-offenders in that program had finished their sentences and were no longer under correctional supervision. In the proposed program they would be on parole and have to work, on pain of a return to prison. The difference from the Washington work release program, which was mandatory, is that supervision would be far more work-focused.

A third element needed is orientation to the demands of working. Even if training is not generally effective, men who have lived behind bars need some preparation for working. Fourth, they need some help dealing with other problems in their lives, such as health, housing, and relations with their families. Those challenges must be addressed before any work program can succeed. That suggests that a reenty work requirement should initially be part-time, allowing time to address these other problems. In both New York City and Wisconsin, mandatory work assignments for welfare mothers have been less than full-time, to accommodate remediation and other activities.

America Works

One program combining these four elements is the Criminal Justice Program run by American Works in New York City.[71] AW here applies to men the same private-sector approach to work placement that it has used successfully with welfare mothers. Ex-offenders are given an intensive orientation, lasting up to six weeks, to getting a job and working, including interviewing, dress, and behavior. They are then placed by sales representatives in private firms that recruit low-skilled labor from AW. Once placed, AW “corporate representatives” visit the clients on the job, also talk to the employers, and help to work out any problems the new hires may have.

Thus, work is overseen and arranged, although jobs are found privately rather than created. Clients also receive preparation for work and help in working out difficulties. AW is financed largely through incentive payments. It receives $1,160 from government for each initial job placement, , then $2,088 for each placement that lasts at least 90 days, then a final $464 for each that lasts six months or more, for a total of $3,712. In its first year from 2001, the Criminal Justice Program placed 78 percent of the clients completing its orientation in jobs, and of these 44 percent held their jobs for at least 90 days.

This program has served not only parolees who are referred to it but other ex-offenders who chose the program themselves, Food Stamp recipients (who also face a work test), and men from New York City’s child support enforcement program. A version of the program serving only ex-offenders will soon be evaluated by Public/Private Ventures. In this version, the orientation will be given to clients in prison, before they leave to come to New York.

Center for Employment Opportunities

An alternative model is offered by the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), also in New York City. Parolees come to CEO from the state prison system.[72] They initially receive several days of pre-employment instruction, then are assigned to work crews that CEO maintains through its Neighborhood Work Project (NWP). There they do maintenance and repairs for local government agencies. Their attendance, performance, and comportment are monitored daily, and they are also paid daily, which assuages their need for immediate income. Clients works for NWP full-time, four days a week.

On the fifth day, they report to a Vocational Development Program (VDP), where they work with a “job coach” who instructs them on job interviewing and helps them straighten out personal problems that could interfere with working. After two weeks in NWP, they also see a job developer, who lines up interviews for them with private employers. They stay in NWP as long as needed to get a regular job, with a limit of 75 days. After placement, they are followed up for retention at 30, 60, 90, and 180 days. CEO's retention rate at six months has been about 40 percent, and it has recently begun tracking retention over a y ear.

CEO sells its programs to state parole officers in the city as a way to keep their parolees employed. It also serves youth returning from the state Shock Incarceration program (boot camp), and it serves some offenders leaving city jails. It is funded mostly by the parole system, the agencies that hire its work crews, and other government agencies. The core program—NWP and VDP serving state parolees—is one of four being assessed in MDRC's Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ evaluation. In addition, the Joyce Foundation has begun an evaluation of a transitional work program for ex-offenders, similar to CEO, at five sites in the Midwest.

In both AW and CEO, work is overseen and arranged, while work orientation and casework are provided. However, AW does not think transitional jobs are needed, while CEO does. AW asserts that only working for regular employers can prepare men for ongoing employment, so creating jobs in government is a waste of time and money. If clients fail, and some do, AW gets them further positions until they succeed. CEO, however, sees a need for supported work. Ex-offenders must work for some period under conditions where serious work demands are made but standards are more lenient than in regular jobs and supervisors accept a mentoring role.

Even if one accepts the need for transitional jobs, the CEO positions seem short, lasting at most 75 days. Positions in other work guarantee programs have lasted six months to a year or more, in part because it was thought to take this long for the clients to absorb work discipline.[73] Longer assignments might improve job retention after clients move on to private jobs. On the other hand, longer positions cost more, and many clients placed in public jobs for enforcement purposes leave them quickly. The average length of an actual government job is far less than the assignment. CEO finds that whether a client can succeed at work is usually settled well before 75 days.

A Federal Demonstration

To sum up the discussion thus far:

- The nation faces a serious social problem due to low work levels among poor men, particularly blacks.
- This problem appears due partly to falling wages and other opportunity constraints but principally to an oppositional culture and a breakdown of work discipline.
- Solutions lie partly with improving wages and skills but mainly with enforcing work in available jobs. This was the combination that succeeded in welfare reform.
- The child support and criminal justice systems offer chances to enforce work among men. Both need to develop programs able both to assist and require their clients to work. But such programs have not yet shown the clear impacts on employment seen in welfare work programs.

Localities with serious poverty appear to need a mandatory work facility to which low-income men could be referred if they were persistently nonworking despite an obligation to work. This includes low-skilled men in arrears on their child support and ex-offenders on parole. The program would assign them to jobs—private if possible, otherwise public—where their compliance would be monitored and enforced, on pain of incarceration.

Such a program probably would raise child support collections. The evidence that it would raise work levels, however, is still only suggestive. Hence, the best role for national policy currently is to promote the sort of program development that lay behind welfare reform. In the 1980s, early studies by MDRC, chiefly in San Diego, established that mandatory work programs tied to welfare could raise the employment and earnings of welfare mothers substantially. Then in the 1990s, further studies showed that these programs had more impact if they stressed work in available jobs rather than education and training for better jobs later. That evidence came partly from MDRC’s evaluation of the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program in California and partly from its National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS), a study of eleven welfare work programs around the country.[74] The requirements to participate in work programs and to “work first” were essentially the policies instituted by welfare reform in the later 1990s.

In welfare work, the first stage of program development was funded largely by states and foundations, the second by the federal government. The same might well be true for men's programs. The first stage might be comprised of Parents Fair Share plus the evaluations of AW and CEO and the Joyce study that are now underway. PFS, although less successful than the early welfare work programs, taught important lessons about how to promote work among child support defaulters. The current projects, largely privately funded, may well do the same for work among ex-offenders.[75] Then, assuming these studies show potential, the second stage would be a federal comparative evaluation of different strategies for men's programs comparable to NEWWS.

The cost of such studies appears manageable.[76] The PFS evaluation cost $12-$15 million. The NEWWS evaluation covered eleven programs over thirteen years (1989-2002) and cost about $30 million. The current MDRC assessment of CEO will cost $4 to $5 million. However, costs in these studies were inflated by the surveys used to track results and by the NEWWS studies of child and family effects. A study of men's work programs without these dimensions, which simply used unemployment insurance reporting to track work effects, should cost much less. The AW and Joyce studies together cost around $6 million.

On the other hand, the welfare work studies typically did not fund the program being studied, only the evaluations. The services and benefits were already defrayed largely by welfare and other existing programs. A men's program would well involve benefits not now provided, such as transitional jobs, and the evaluation would have to fund these as well as the research. Then again, transitional jobs can also generate revenue, offsetting some of their cost.

Due to Bush Administration initiatives, federal funding for men's programs is already substantial. For 2005, the Administration proposed $300 million for prison reentry programs, leading to the $22.5 million being spent on Ready4Work. For 2006 it proposed a further $75 million for these programs. Reauthorization of welfare reform in 2006 included $50 million for responsible fatherhood programs. But the administration's emphasis is on involving faith-based and other community organizations. Evaluations are secondary. Thus, it is doubtful that anything systematic will be learned about "what works." Future appropriations should focus on a research structure, like NEWWS, that can help settle the best model for work enforcement for men.

Objections

Aside from the expense of evaluations, several objections might be raised to the direction I have proposed—solving the male work problem with mandatory work programs.

Cost

Could government afford to create the work programs needed to enforce work on men, even if their effectiveness were proven? Government jobs are costly. That was one reason why welfare reform largely placed recipients in jobs in the private sector. Only Wisconsin and New York City invested heavily in government jobs. In New York, the positions cost $43 million in 1999, or about $1,400 per filled slot per year excluding child care.[77] Such expense might be particularly difficult for the child support system, which already takes in less in collections than it costs.[78]

On the other hand, PFS did generate gains in child support collections. Whether these were sufficient to defray the cost of the program is unclear, as no cost-benefit analysis was done. In criminal justice, the potential economies are much larger because work programs might reduce incarceration, which is enormously expensive. And transitional positions can generate revenues well as costs. In New York State, it costs $41,449 to house a prison inmate for a year.[79] In contrast, it costs CEO $33,220 a year to provide a slot in its community work crews. Since an average of six clients will hold a slot in a year, the cost per client is only $5,537. Furthermore, these costs are largely defrayed by the income CEO earns from the agencies that employ its crews. The net cost is only $3,219 per slot or $536 per client.[80] If the current evaluation finds that work programs also improve client employment and cuts recidivism, the gains would be even larger.[81]

These cost issues imply that further evaluations of men's work programs, including those now underway, should include cost/benefit as well as impact assessments.

Politics

Would it be politic to create new programs for nonworking men? Many authors note that they are the most feared and least popular of all the poor. They are not “deserving” like the working poor or the elderly, nor do they tend innocent children like welfare mothers. But to suggest that this bars government from helping them is to misunderstand public attitudes. While the voters do disapprove of the way many poor people live, they still support helping them provided programs promote good behavior. Desires to save money are quite secondary, contrary to what many academics assume[82] Welfare reform is enormously popular simply because it promotes work. The billions spent on child and health care and wage subsidies to accomplish this more than outweighed the savings from caseload reductions, and no objections were raised.

Proposals for men’s work programs must be carefully framed. The main reason to support them cannot be that the men are unfortunate, or that the community would benefit in practical ways if they went to work, such as lower crime, although both things are true. Still less can government seem to be negotiating with the nonworkers over the terms on which they will work, as might appear if they were offered only higher wages or wage subsidies. Rather, work policies must offer nonworkers the same terms as other low-skilled people who already work. Above all, programs must directly affirm the work norm. They must demand work of men in the same direct way that welfare did for its recipients, and there must be clear gains in work. Past programs that tried to do that were popular, and improved programs could also be.[83]

Implementation

The greatest practical obstacle to my proposals probably is that most child support and corrections agencies, which I would rely on to enforce work, do not now accept employment as a central goal. One reason child support has not seriously addressed the work problem is that its routines are modeled on middle-class absent fathers who usually have the means to pay their judgments. So child support agencies tend to view all nonpaying fathers as deadbeats who could pay up if pressed hard enough. This fails to credit the serious employment and income problems that about a third of the nonpayers have. PFS found it difficult to work closely with child support personnel because of their reluctance to ease pressure on the men.[84] Around half the states currently run work programs for child support defaulters, most of them with enforcement aspects like PFS. But the programs appear small and largely separate from the main child support operation.[85]

Prisons, for their part, see their mission as punishing offenders, not helping them succeed after prison. Parole agencies exist to enforce parole rules. They insist that parolees work, as that is among the rules in most states. But they see achieving work largely as the convicts' responsibility rather than their own. Neither prisons nor parole focuses on what happens to men after they leave supervision. This mindset is one reason why supported work programs for prisoners failed in the 1960s and 1970s. The current experimental work programs for ex-offenders report similar problems working with parole officers today. To solve the work problem, as well as reduce recidivism, the corrections system must be made more accountable for how its clients turn out.[86]

In the short term, the implementation problem can be minimized by keeping work programs separate from ordinary child support and corrections agencies. The work mission would be vested in a separate operation that was organized around it. Child support and corrections still have the power to incarcerate, the final sanction behind getting the men to participate and work. But they would be moved into the background, their authority invoked only if necessary.

In the end, however, fundamental change can occur only when the regular child support and corrections agencies incorporate the work mission. This was what happened with welfare reform. The idea of putting welfare mothers to work was pioneered in experimental programs, but then mainstream welfare adopted that goal as its own. In the extreme case—Wisconsin—welfare was entirely rebuilt around employment. Only then did the world change for welfare families, producing the large diversion effects seen in the last decade.[87] Similarly here, nonworking men will probably not take available jobs in visibly higher numbers until child support and corrections consistently press them to do so. When they do, on the welfare precedent, many nonworking men will go to work voluntarily, not only those immediately subject to sanctions. Work effects would be much larger than program evaluations under the old conditions might suggest.

Administrative change, in turn, finally rests on politics. Successful work programs must be developed, but then they must be implemented across the country by politicians and administrators who believe in them. That means, not just driving new bureaucratic routines down to the ground, but changing expectations in the culture. Elected leaders, speaking for the public, must credibly state that work will now be seriously expected of men with debts to society. And work will also be newly rewarded. The community will share with jobless men the costs and the benefits of change. The purpose is not to exclude them or assign blame. Rather, it is to change lives and integrate the society. If the commitment is clear, on past precedent, the poor will respond, and work levels will rise.

9,923 words

Endnotes

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[1] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, tables 15, 22.

[2] Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill, "Work and Marriage: The Way to End Poverty and Welfare" (Washington, DC: Brookings, September 2003), pp. 3-4.

[3] Lawrence M. Mead, *Government Matters: Welfare Reform in Wisconsin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), chaps. 9; Jeffrey Grogger and Lynn A. Karoly, *Welfare Reform: Effects of a Decade of Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 171-2.

[4] Harry J. Holzer, Paul Offner, and Elaine Sorensen, "Declining Employment Among Young Black Less-Educated Men: The Role of Incarceration and Child Support," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 329-33.

[5] For what follows, I am indebted to a meeting of experts on the men's problem that I convened at New York University in December 2004 with support from the Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute. My interpretation, however, is my own and should not be attributed to the other participants or to CCI, MI, or their funders.

[6] In technical terms, the elasticity of labor supply with respect to wages is positive. The estimates come from Chinhui Juhn, Kevin M. Murphy, and Robert H. Topel, "Why Has the Natural Rate of Unemployment Increased over Time?" *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* 1991, no. 2 (1991): 75-142; Lawrence F. Katz, "Wage Subsidies for the Disadvantaged," in *Generating Jobs: How to Increase Demand for Less-Skilled Workers*, ed. Richard B. Freeman and Peter Gottschalk (New York: Russell Sage, 1998), chap. 1; and Jeff Grogger, "Market Wages and Youth Crime," *Journal of Labor Economics* 16, no. 4 (October 1998): 756-91. My thanks to Harry Holzer for explaining this research.

[7] Harry J. Holzer and Paul Offner, "Trends in the Employment Outcomes of Young Black Men, 1979-2000," in *Black Males Left Behind,* ed. Ronald B. Mincy (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2006), chap. 2.

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[8] Ronald F. Ferguson, “The Working-poverty Trap,” *The Public Interest*, no. 158 (Winter 2005): 71-82.

[9] George J. Borjas, "The Demographic Determinants of the Demand for Black Labor," in *The Black Youth Employment Crisis*, ed. Richard B. Freeman and Harry J. Holzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), chap. 5; Rebecca M. Blank and Jonah Gelbach, “Are Less-Educated Women Crowding Less-Educated Men Out of the Labor Market?” in *Black Men Left Behind*, ed. Mincy, chap. 5.

[10] George J. Borjas, “The Labor Demand Curve Is Downward Sloping: Reexamining the Impact of Immigration on the Labor Market,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, no. 4 (November 2003): 1335-74. Borjas estimates that high-school dropouts lost 5 percent of wages to immigration over the 1980s and 1990s. For the debate about the issue, see Roger Lowenstein, “The Immigration Equation,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 9, 2006.

[11] Peter Edelman, Harry J. Holzer, and Paul Offner, *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2006), pp. 28-30.

[12] This assumes an absolute meaning of poverty like the current federal definition. If poverty were defined relative to the median family income, inequality would be more relevant.

[13] Holzer et al, “Declining Employment,” pp. 333-47.

[14] Lawrence M. Mead, *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 139-40.

[15] Elijah Anderson, "The Story of John Turner," *The Public Interest*, no. 108 (Summer 1992): 3-34; Mark Kleiman, “Coerced Abstinence: A Neopaternalist Drug Policy Initiative,” in *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*, ed. Lawrence M. Mead (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1997), chap. 6.

[16] Harry J. Holzer, "Black Youth Nonemployment: Duration and Job Search," in *Black Youth Employment Crisis*, ed. Freeman and Holzer, chap. 1.

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[17] Alford A. Young, "Low-Income Black Men on Work Opportunity, Work Resources, and Job Training Programs," in *Black Men Left Behind*. ed. Mincy, pp. 150-8. For an early statement of this culture, see Elliot Liebow, *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967). For a later and more hostile statement, see Orlando Patterson, "A Poverty of the Mind," *New York Times*, March 26, 2006, p. wk13.

[18] The apologists for capitalism in its formative era argued that the market place would foster calm calculation at the expense of the warlike passions they associated with feudal society. See Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). But like the aristocrats of old, today's nonworking men appear strongly motivated by honor, even at the expense of economizing.

[19] Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn M. Neckerman, "'We'd Love to Hire Them, But . . .': The Meaning of Race for Employers," in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1991), pp. 203-32.

[20] Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), chaps. 2-4.

[21] Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[22] Frank E. Furstenberg, Jr., Kay E. Sherwood, and Mercer L. Sullivan, *Caring and Paying: What Fathers and Mothers Say About Child Support* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, July 1992).

[23] Edin and Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep*, pp. 135-6, 177-9.

[24] Edelman et al., *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*, p. 24.

[25] Mead, *New Politics of Poverty*, pp. 147-55.

[26] Daniel P. Moynihan, "A Family Policy for the Nation," *America*, September 18, 1965, p. 283.

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[27] Blaine Harden, "'Dead Broke' Dads' Child Support Struggle," *New York Times*, January 29, 2002, p. A19; and Erik Eckholm, "Help for the Hardest Part of Prison: Staying Out," *New York Times*, August 12, 2006, p. A1, A12.

[28] Edelman et al., *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*, chaps. 5-6; Wendell Primus, "Improving Public Policies to Increase the Income and Employment of Low-Income Nonresident Fathers," in *Black Men Left Behind*, ed. Mincy, pp. 226-37; Edmund S. Phelps, *Rewarding Work: How to Restore Participation and Self-Support to Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Gordon Berlin's chapter in this volume.

[29] Robert Moffitt, "Incentive Effects of the U.S. Welfare System: A Review," *Journal of Economic Literature* 30, no. 1 (March 1992): 13-19.

[30] Gary Burtless, "The Work Response to a Guaranteed Income: A Survey of Experimental Evidence," in *Lessons from the Income Maintenance Experiments: Proceedings of a Conference Held In September 1986*, ed. Alicia H. Munnell (Boston: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, n.d.), pp. 22-52. Wage subsidies do not appear promising, Burtless concludes, because "The labor supply functions estimated in the experiments are vertical or backward-bending." (p. 48).

[31] The best known of several studies is Bruce D. Meyer and Dan T. Rosenbaum, "Welfare, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and the Labor Supply of Single Mothers," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 116, no. 3 (August 2001): 1063-1114. One may also doubt whether the claimed EITC effect actually occurred, as field observers of welfare reform did not hear of the credit motivating welfare mothers to go to work. More likely, mothers went to work due to welfare reform and then received EITC as a windfall. See Mead, *Government Matters*, pp. 175-81.

[32] Jobs-Plus was an attempt to raise work levels in public housing projects, principally by reducing the rent increases tenants faced if they worked. It achieved earnings gains for some men in the projects. But there are few such men, and these men were mostly husbands in two-parent welfare cases, not the more detached men who are at the heart of the male employment problem. See

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Howard S. Bloom, James A. Riccio, and Nandita Verma, with Johanna Walter, *Promoting Work in Public Housing: The Effectiveness of JOBS-Plus: Final Report* (New York: MDRC, March 2005), chapter 4.

[33] Higher wages reduced absenteeism, but special skills, if demanded by a job, increased it . See Ronald Ferguson and Randall Filer, "Do Better Jobs Make Better Workers? Absenteeism from Work Among Inner-City Black Youths," in *Black Youth Employment Crisis*, ed. Freeman and Holzer, chap. 7.

[34] These include Big Brothers Big Sisters, Children's Aid Society-Carrera, and the Quantum Opportunities Program.

[35] Here and below I rely heavily on Robert Lerman, "Helping Out-of-School Youth Attain Labor Market Success: What We Know and How to Learn More" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2004).

[36] Howard S. Bloom, Larry L. Orr, George Cave, Stephen H. Bell, and Fred Doolittle, *The National JTPA Study: Title II-A Impacts on Earnings and Employment at 18 Months* (Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates, May 1992).

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[38] James J. Heckman, "Doing It Right: Job Training and Education," *The Public Interest*, no. 135 (Spring 1999): 86-107.

[39] Lloyd Ulman, "The Uses and Limits of Manpower Policy," *The Public Interest*, no. 34 (Winter 1974): 97-8.

[40] Lawrence M. Mead, "Welfare Employment," in *The New Paternalism*, ed. Mead, chap. 2; Mead, *Government Matters*, chap. 8.

[41] James J. Kemple with Judith Scott-Clayton, *Career Academies: Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes and Educational Attainment* (New York: MDRC, March 2004).

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[42] John Burghardt, Peter Z. Schochet, Sheena McConnell, Terry Johnson, R. Mark Gritz, Steven Glazerman, John Homrighausen, and Russell Jackson, *Does Job Corps Work? Summary of the National Job Corps Study* (Princeton: Mathematica, June 2001).

[43] Hugh Price, “Forward,” in Edelman et al., *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*, p. xvi. Of course, such outcomes do not establish impact. The program is now being evaluated by MDRC.

[44] Lerman, “Helping Out-of-School Youth,” pp. 22-4.

[45] Price, “Forward,” pp. xiv-xv.

[46] U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family : The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1965), pp. 16, 40-3.

[47] Furstenberg et al., *Caring and Paying*: Earl S. Johnson and Fred Doolittle, “Low Income Parents and the Parents’ Fair Share Demonstration” (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, June 1996).

[48] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2004-2005* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 2004), p. 60; Edelman et al., *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*, p. 25.

[49] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, *2004 Green Book: Background Material, and Data on the Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2004), pp. 8.69-8.77.

[50] This figure is the difference between the 56 percent of 2.8 million poor single mothers who had a support order and the 31 percent who received any payment.

[51] Fred Doolittle, Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, and Sharon Rowser, *Building Opportunities, Enforcing Obligations: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Parents’ Fair Share* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, December 1998); John M., Martinez and Cynthia Miller, *Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents’ Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers’ Employment* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, October 2000).

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[52] Ron Blasco, *Children First Program: Final Evaluation Report* (Madison: Department of Workforce Development, November 2000).

[53] Wade F. Horn and Isabel V. Sawhill, “Fathers, Mothers, and Welfare Reform,” in *The New World of Welfare: An Agenda for Reauthorization and Beyond*, ed. Rebecca M. Blank and Ron Haskins (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001). pp. 425-7; Irving Garfinkel, “Child Support in the New World of Welfare,” in *New World of Welfare*, ed. Blank and Haskins, pp. 452-3.

[54] Jane C. Venohr, David A. Price, and Tracy Griffith, “OSCE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Client Characteristics and Program Outcomes” (Denver: Policy Studies Inc., September 2003).

[55] Doolittle et al., *Building Opportunities*, chap. 2; John Wallace and Stuart Yeh, “Employment Component for the Parents Fair Share Demonstration” (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, July 1991); telephone discussion with Fred Doolittle, April 3, 2006.

[56] Cynthia Miller and Virginia Knox, “*The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents’ Fair Share* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, November 2001), pp. 12-16.

[57] Primus, “Improving Public Policies,” pp. 238-9. Such an arrangement could apply only to child support debt owed to government, not to debts owed to the family, unless the mother agreed.

[58] Jeremy Travis, *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prison Reentry* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2005), p. 3; Edelman et al., *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*, p. 25; Holzer et al., “Declining Employment,” p. 334 n. 10.

[59] Travis, *But They All Come Back*, pp. 34, 94.

[60] Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 112.

[61] Robert Martinson, “What Works?--Questions and Answers About Prison Reform,” *The Public Interest*, no. 35 (Spring 1974): 22-54; Travis, *But They All Come Back*, pp. 107-8, 160-2, 168-71; Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home*, pp. 175-84, 246-7.

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[62] Board of Directors, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, *Summary and Findings of the National Supported Work Demonstration* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger. 1980).

[63] Travis, *But They All Come Back*, pp. 171-4; Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home*, p. 99

[64] Amy L.Solomon, Vera Kachnowski, and Avinash Bhati, "Does Parole Work? Analyzing the Impact of Postprison Supervision on Rearrest Outcomes" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, March 2005); Joan Petersilia and Susan Turner, "Intensive Probation and Parole," *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research* 17 (1993): 281-335.

[65] Joshua Good and Pamela Sherrid, "When the Gates Open: Ready4Work: A National Response to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis" (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, October 2005); and Linda Jucovy, "Just Out: Early Lessons from the Ready4Work Prisoner Reentry Initiative" (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, February 2006).

[66] Interview with Jeremy Travis, in New York, NY, on July 20, 2006; Petersilia and Turner, "Intensive Probation and Parole," pp. 313-15.

[67] Kleiman, "Coerced Abstinence." Here and in the remainder of this subsection, I largely follow Travis, *But They All Come Back*, pp. 173-6, 179-82.

[68] Travis, *But They All Come Back*, p. 162.

[69] Harry J. Holzer, Steven Raphael, and Michael A. Stoll, "How Do Employer Perceptions of Crime and Incarceration Affect the Employment Prospects of Less-Educated Young Black Men?" in *Black Men Left Behind*, ed. Mincy, chap. 3; Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home*, p. 119.

[70] Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 127-8.

[71] This account is based on an interview with Peter Cove and Lee Bowes, the managers of America Works, in New York, NY, on July 6, 2006, and on William B. Eimicke and Steven Cohen, "America Works' Criminal Justice Program: Providing Second Changes Through Work" (New York: Manhattan Institute, November 2002).

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[72] The following is based on an interview with Mindy Tarlow, executive director CEO, on February 22, 2006, and on Center for Employment Opportunities and MDRC, *The Power of Work: The Center for Employment Opportunities Comprehensive Prisoner Reentry Program* (New York: Center for Employment Opportunities, March 2006), and other CEO materials.

[73] These programs would include the National Supported Work Demonstration, the public jobs components of welfare reform in New York City and Wisconsin, and also the government jobs created under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) in the 1970s.

[74] James Riccio, Daniel Friedlander, and Stephen Freedman, *GAIN: Benefits, Costs, and Three-Year Impacts of a Welfare-to-Work Program* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, September 1994); and Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Surjeet Ahluwalia, Jennifer Brooks, Stephen Freedman, Anna Gassman-Pines, Lisa Gennetian, Gayle Hamilton, Sharon McGroder, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Martha Zaslow, *How Effective Are Different Welfare-to-Work Approaches? Five-Year Adult and Child Impacts for Eleven Programs* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, December 2001).

[75] The CEO study has joint federal government and foundation funding.

[76] The following discussion and cost estimates draw on conversations with researchers at MDRC and officials at the U.S. Administration for Children and Families.

[77] Jason A. Turner and Thomas Main, “Work Experience under Welfare Reform,” in *New World of Welfare*, ed. Blank and Haskins, pp. 299-302. For a transitional jobs program aimed at disadvantaged welfare mothers in Georgia costing $18.6 million, see Michelle K. Derr, LaDonna Pavetti, and Angelina KewalRamani, *Georgia GoodWorks!: Transitional Work and Intensive Support for TANF Recipients Nearing the Time Limit* (Washington, DC: Mathematica, December 2002). This study did not include an impact evaluation.

[78] That is chiefly because, with fewer single mothers on welfare, less of the child support collected goes to reimburse welfare. See U.S. Congress, *2004 Green Book*, pp. 8.65-8.69.

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[79] U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "State Prison Expenditures, 2001" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, June 2004), p. 3. I indexed New York's 2001 figure of $36,835 to $41,449 in 2005 dollars, using the unadjusted consumer price index for all urban consumers.

[80] Data from the Center for Employment Opportunities.

[81] Hugh B. Price, "Transitioning Ex-Offenders into Jobs and Society," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2006.

[82] Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chaps. 2, 8; Fay Lomax Cook and Edith J. Barrett, *Support for the American Welfare State: The Views of Congress and the Public* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

[83] Travis, *But They All Come Back*, pp. 182-3.

[84] Ronald B. Mincy and Elaine J. Sorenson, "Deadbeats and Turnips in Child Support Reform," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 44-51; Doolittle et al., *Building Opportunities*, chap. 2.

[85] "Child Support and Job Projects For Fathers by State" (Washington, DC: U.S. Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, July 27, 2006); conversation with Rob Cohen, U.S. Administration for Children and Families, August 11, 2006.

[86] Travis, *But They All Come Back*, pp. 174, 330; Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home*, pp. 172-4; Heather Mac Donald, "How to Straighten Out Ex-Cons," *City Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 24-37.

[87] Mead, *Government Matters*.

Table 1. Poor Men: Numbers and Percent of Male Population, by Age and Race, 2004:

Figures for poor in thousands

	Ages							
	16-50		16-24		25-35		36-50	
Race/Ethnicity	*Poor*	*% pop*	*Poor*	*% pop*	*Poor*	*% pop*	*Poor*	*% pop*
Total	7,543	*10*	2,800	*15*	2,*099*	*10*	2,644	*8*
White	5,321	*9*	1,912	*13*	1,495	*9*	1,914	*7*
Black	1,618	*18*	666	*26*	412	*16*	541	*15*
Hispanic	1,922	*16*	670	*20*	678	*15*	575	*13*
Native American	131	*20*	49	*27*	44	*22*	39	*13*
Asian	316	*9*	109	*15*	94	*8*	112	*8*

Note: Racial categories are exclusive. Native American includes American Indian and Alaska Native. Asian includes Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders. Hispanics may be of any race. Persons of two or more races are excluded. Figures may not add due to rounding.
Source: Author's tabulations from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Table 2. Percentages of Men Working Full-Time/Full-Year and Not Working, by Age, Race, and Income Level, 2004:

Figures in percent

	Ages							
	16-50		16-24		25-35		36-50	
Race/Ethnicity	*FT/FY*	*No work*	*FT/FY*	*No work*	*FT/FY*	*No work*	*FT/FY*	*No work*
ALL INCOMES								
Total	62	16	25	36	72	9	77	10
White	64	14	26	31	74	7	78	9
Black	51	29	18	57	61	17	69	18
Hispanic	63	16	33	37	73	7	76	10
Native American	49	23	24	39	56	14	61	21
Asian	63	19	17	52	70	12	80	7
IN POVERTY								
Total	19	51	9	59	27	39	23	52
White	21	46	10	53	31	34	25	48
Black	11	65	5	75	17	48	14	65
Hispanic	33	40	14	61	47	22	41	36
Native American	15	50	10	52	28	32	7	66
Asian	17	55	3	68	15	59	31	38

Note: See Table 1. The category of working but less than full-time/full-year is omitted.
Source: See Table 1.